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WHY I WISH TO VISIT AMERICA.

MANY more years than I like to acknowledge have passed away since a day when my father caught me slinking out of his library with Mrs. Trollope's "Travels in the United States" under my arm. He laughed at my absurd precocity, for I was little more than a child, and as he took the book away from me, he said, "My boy, that is not a book for you to read. It is not even true. You shall go to America yourself one day, when you're a man, and you'll know better than to write that kind of stuff." It was a great hope that was stirred by that promise that I should go to America myself some day. I used to think about it, and wonder when I might look forward to being a man, and how it could be managed, and who would help me, and whether I should settle there and own a slave. A hundred times I have dreamt of Boston, and of Richmond, for somehow I never thought of New York, and there was no Chicago then, and no San Francisco. Perhaps, too, the United States might collapse before I ever grew to be a man, and that was a prospect that made my heart sick to think of. I have been told, indeed, that one night I awoke with a cry, and was heard to exclaim, "Pray, God, keep America till I've been and seen it!"

And yet I never have seen America, and I am afraid I never shall see it now, though my youthful prayer has been answered, and America has been kept and seems in small danger of collapsing yet awhile. I have read a great many books about America since those days; but I am bound to say they have not made me much in love with the writers, and I am also bound to say that they have given me very, very little information upon exactly those points that I most wished to inquire into. Of late years I have altogether given up this kind of literature. I believe the last time I looked into any one of these so-called "Travels," or "Tours," or "Reminiscences," was when Mr. Anthony Trollope's volumes appeared, and I could not get through them.

Somehow my father's words on the mother's book seemed to apply to the son's, and spite of myself his voice seemed to be saying to me, "It is not even true!"

But though I have ceased to read books about America, the strong desire to see the New World has never faded; nay, it has increased in intensity as the years have gone on, and what was at first but a vague hankering after something merely visionary, gradually became a definite longing to see and know an attainable reality. My friends laugh at me and assure me I should be very much disappointed; that I should not like it; that no man ought to go to the States after thirty; that at Cincinnati there are only hogs to see, and at Chicago only monstrous corn warehouses, at New York only monster hotels, and at Boston—oh, dear! such arrogant prigs; finally, that it would be quite impossible for me to continue wearing a white cravat over there, for the washing of my linen would simply ruin me. I hold my peace, but I am not convinced, and I still wish to visit America. And why is this wish so strong in me? I will try to answer that question as briefly as I can, but I must needs answer it in a disorderly kind of way, and give my reasons as they occur to me, without any attempt at systematic arrangement.

First and foremost, let it be understood that I wish to visit America because I am so ignorant about the real life of a great nation that has sprung into magnificent maturity in a single century. History has nothing like a parallel to produce, which can for a moment be compared with the growth of this nationality. I use that word advisedly. As to the mere progress in wealth and numbers, that does not impress me much. From anything I have heard or read, it does not seem to me inconceivable that a horde of Chinamen, urged on by avarice and selfishness, might have done quite as much as has been done in the United States in the same time; if John Chinaman had happened to get the start; but if they had done so, they would, I am convinced, have remained a horde of Chinamen still. There would have been no new nation; there would have been nothing like the sublime patriotism that, to my mind, characterizes the great American nation; none of that incomparable chivalry that animated a whole people during the war of secession; none of that proud sensitiveness that surprises cosmopolitan philosophers when they hear Americans speak of "the flag." This is what I should like to look into, like to ask about, like to study on the

spot, namely, What is the amazing cohesive force so infinitely potent to bind together into one corporate, living nationality, atoms so dissimilar as the population that makes up the great American people; which, as I understand it does, seems to give a new focus to whatever old love of home warmed the breast of German, or Dane, or Swiss, or Englishman; which makes them, one and all, forget their old country and their father's house, and lose all desire to return; which, extinguishing the old love of fatherland, replaces it by a new love, a passion for the glory of the present, with its boundless hopes and ambitions, and an almost haughty contempt for traditions; this exulting confidence in a great destiny which disdains the lessons of experience, and does not ask from them guidance or instruction or warning? Am I wrong? or is it not the fact that Americans have incomparably more faith in the *solvitur ambulando* principle than in any other, and that, whenever it is a question between looking back to see what others have done, and looking forward regardless of all precedent, they always prefer striking out a new line rather than following another's lead? Above all men upon earth, Americans are self-reliant, self-asserting. Yet, was there ever a people so much at unity with itself? Selfishness never seems to diminish the intense national pride; the fierce war of parties in politics never seems to affect patriotism. A whisper of disrespect to "our country," or the semblance of a sneer at it, and woe to you! Is not this so? I should like to see the working of this mysterious and, to my mind, awful force, a force that acts upon the new-comer with exceeding rapidity. How soon does the immigrant feel its operation? By what processes does it exercise its prodigious sway? How is it that the Dutchman, who has spent all his life in Java, looks to lay his bones with his father's at Amsterdam or the Hague; that our own Australian colonists, when they have "made their pile," come back to us and call England still their home; that the Frenchman is always a Frenchman, with an astonishing faculty of producing a bad copy of French fashions wherever he settles, and no power of assimilating himself to the manners and customs of the people among whom he sojourns; but that, when people go to America, it is only a question of time when they will become Americans—become absorbed, that is, into a new nationality? These are questions I should like to ask on the spot, and, if possible, test the truth of the answers suggested.

As there are these problems that present themselves in what I may call the national life of America, so there are others in the political life of the American people that I have never been fortunate enough to find discussed adequately.

We in England have been spending fifty years in timidly feeling our way toward giving our masses a voice in the election of members of Parliament. We are on the eve of a great change, when something very like manhood suffrage will be ushered in among us. It is undeniable that among the upper and middle classes there is a feeling of great uneasiness at the prospect, amounting in some quarters to absolute terror and despair, of what may be coming in the not very distant future. Yet America has prospered in spite of universal suffrage, and, as far as I know, seems to be by no means afraid of it. One hears, indeed, of numbers of dainty people, who are sometimes spoken of as "the upper classes" in American society, affecting to hold aloof from political life and taking no part in the strife of parties. It may be so; but do not these citizens of the great commonwealth who give themselves such airs—these *ἄχρηστοι πολῖται*, as somebody calls them, who, like naughty children, wont play because they can't always be on the inside—constitute a very insignificant number? The fact remains that the enormous majority of Americans are not only earnest and, if I am rightly informed, passionate politicians, but they go to the polls in shoals. That fact alone strikes some of us here with wonder; and the wonder increases upon us enormously when we are assured that this deep interest in political questions appears to be wholly distinct from the political excitement that intermittently rouses the masses in Europe to outbreaks of frenzied hate against established institutions. In France men get wild with panic lest the *ouvriers* should turn upon the *bourgeoisie*. In Germany the socialists have their own ends in view, and do not disguise them. In Ireland the wretched peasantry avow their designs to confiscate the land. The war of politics with us is eminently selfish, and in proportion as it is carried on with more and more passion the less there seems to be of real patriotism. On our side of the Atlantic it is becoming increasingly apparent that the characteristic of our political warfare may be described as

"Each man lusting for all that is not his own."

Mr. Lowell has summed it all up in one of those stinging antitheses that are so stinging they can hardly be true, when speaking from the American point of view, he says :

“Their people’s turned to mob—our mob’s turned people.”

How is it that in America the masses can be disciplined so readily to take their side, and to engage so heartily in the fray, moving together as mysteriously as the swallows that with scarce audible twitterings gather in thousands, plume their wings for flight, seem to hesitate for a brief hour, and the next are gone? We, indeed, have of late been aping some American practices, and trying our hands at the caucus, and the three hundred, and what not. I suspect it is a very feeble imitation, and I suspect that one of my American friends was right when he said with a laugh: “Your fellows don’t know their business; they don’t understand what they are talking about. They’re first-rate at turning out steel pens and such small ware, but they’d better leave our political machinery alone. You’re too crowded up in your little island to find room for one of our big fly-wheels!” But how is all this enthusiasm for politics kept up with comparatively so little appeal to the lowest selfishness? and how are these immense numbers manipulated, the vast armies handled as skillfully as if they were soldiers in parade? It is all inexplicable to large numbers of wiseacres in England, who will persist in talking of petty “motives” and “reason” as if they were the prime factors in every social problem.

And this leads me to touch upon another matter, on which I feel myself profoundly ignorant, and which I am sure that others here are quite as ignorant about as I am. We are told that in America there is a recognized profession of politics, just as here there is a medical profession or a legal profession, or, if this is putting the case too strongly, just as here there is the profession of journalism. How in the world do the members of this profession get along? A new President is elected, and we are told that all the old officials are turned out. Where do they go? What becomes of them? What is the effect upon the executive? With us the patronage of the government, at any rate in the civil service, has been reduced to a minimum. Our executive is to a very great extent, indeed, independent of the government of the day. “Men may come and men may go,” but permanent secretaries “go on forever.” So do commissioners and their clerks,

and the thousands of stipendiaries to whom it matters not one straw whether the Radicals are in or the Tories. With us, when a man has gained an appointment by passing a good examination at eighteen or nineteen years old, it is his own fault if he ever loses it. Practically, there is no getting rid of him as long as he can do his work; he is as safe as a judge, and irremovable. But in America, we hear, every four years they shuffle the cards, and away they go! What results from this? Am I wrongly informed? or is there more absolute patronage, patronage *pur et simple*, in the hands of the President of the United States than in any other hands on the face of the earth? Assuming that it is so, what, I ask, must be the effect upon the moral sentiments of the people at large, inevitably brought day by day and hour by hour into relations with a class of eager office-seekers, hungry, alert, jealous, disappointed, unprincipled, or vindictive, according to their success or failure, in getting what they consider their due. Do the "outs" accept the logic of facts without demur, and forthwith betake themselves to other callings?

That in every change in the chief magistracy of a nation every stipendiary of the executive, from the postman to the judge of the supreme court, should get his dismissal, and the Democrat clerk in the custom-house who was behindhand with his work on Monday evening should leave his arrears to be made up by his Republican successor on Tuesday morning; that when President A enters upon his office, a new game should be begun, and the pieces be all set up again, regardless of the position in which the knights or the pawns were when President B was checkmated,—all this seems to us, from our point of view, not only difficult to understand, but difficult to imagine. Surely, theory and fact in this matter must differ very widely. Am I only exposing my ignorance?

I have used the terms "upper and middle classes" on a previous page. When I have asked Americans what the subtle barriers are that in American society separate class from class, they have replied more than once, "In America there are no classes! We have no differences of rank with us." Strange! And yet we hear of colonels and generals and senators often enough, and I am much mistaken if such titles are at all less esteemed on that side of the water than on this. Be it as it may, however, rank and title may be shadows, but class differences are substantial things. With us the titular aristocracy constitute

a class, an inner circle, that at one time united in itself shadow and substance, and now tends to become less exclusive and less influential, however loudly some may complain that

“Within these British Islands
'Tis the substance that wanes ever,
'Tis the symbol that exceeds.”

We love rank, because we have a lingering suspicion that it somehow symbolizes wealth, or power, or brilliant intellectual gifts, or great public services, that have forced their possessors into the front rank at some time or other, and received their due recognition in the shape of titular distinction conferred either recently or in days gone by. But if a title is found to be dissociated from any nobleness of character, and is unsupported by brain power or purse power, it will not save a man from humiliating snubs, or give him the *entrée* to any of our upper classes. For we have more than one upper class among us, as other nations have had and will continue to have while the world lasts. In that social world where Mrs. Grundy bears sway, our titular aristocracy undoubtedly are the acknowledged leaders, and to them great homage is paid. But it is not only because a man is an earl, or a lady is a duchess, that the one or the other is surrounded by a little court, approached with deference and treated with studied respect, but because both the one and the other are rich enough to “support the title,” as we say. Yes, it is true that in some sense or other

“Our nobles wear their ermine on the outside or walk blackly,
In presence of the social law, as most ignoble men.”

You may protest that society in England is under the dominion of a plutocracy, then. Yes! and No! Yes, in so far as it is true and always must be true, that no man or woman can live on familiar terms, and keep up the habitual intercourse with the leisure classes, without a certain amount of money; no, in so far as it is also true that money alone, however abundant it may be, will never, among us, give any one an introduction to what we call society. I have heard of cases, and I know of one, where a millionaire from our colonies has taken a palace in London, and lived *en prince*; has been visited by no one, failed to get into any but a third-rate club, found no one to entertain and but few

people to speak to; and finally has gone back from whence he came, astonished, disappointed, and soured. They tell me that wealth in America will gain admission to any society for any one. I have been repeatedly assured by intelligent Americans that this is so; yet I cannot understand that it should be so. I can quite understand that, whatever a man's rank, or gifts, or prospects may be, he would find it very painful to mix with the upper ten thousand if he could not afford to pay for cab-hire, or keep up his subscription at the club, every day finding it hard to get his dinner, and every night perplexed *de lodice paranda*; but I can no more understand how a mere expenditure of cash could get X, Y, or Z into the best society, than I can understand how a payment of, say £10,000, would get an average cricketer into the All-England eleven, or a second-rate oar into the University crew. The Corporation of London is a plutocracy; but society, while accepting his lavish hospitality, treats even the Lord Mayor of London *de haut en bas*. The Lady Mayoress receives ambassadors with condescension; next year some young *attaché* stares at Mrs. Tomkins, and wonders where he has met that woman.

Who are the upper classes in America? It is nonsense to say there are none. Not to speak of those states in pre-Christian times that tended more or less to become dominated over by an oligarchy, Athens was at least as pure a republic as America is; her people were as proud, as self-asserting, as audaciously enterprising, as ambitious, as shrewd in commercial ventures, as greedy for money, and as lavish in spending it, as the Americans are; yet the "first families" among the Athenians were as haughty as Spaniards, as exclusive as the old French noblesse, and bragged of their ancestry as absurdly as Scotchmen do. If a loud-voiced, bawling demagogue came to the front by sheer force of will and impudence, his political opponents never allowed the populace to forget that he was brought up in a tan-yard. Demosthenes gives point to his most withering sarcasms against Æschines by reminding his audience that he was the son of a school-mistress, and had to scrub the ink off the desks at which his mother taught the dirty little urchins; and who that has read the "Clouds" can forget Strepsiades's doleful lamentation over his fatal mistake in marrying a fine lady with a pedigree, and begetting a son who did not take after his father? There must be an aristocracy in America who stand upon their birth

rather than their mere wealth, yet how little we hear of them. What recognition do they receive? How is it they so seldom come to be leaders? How is it that Hyperbolus seems to push aside Cimon, and Cleon is quite too much for Alcibiades?

It used to be said that no two Englishmen could be found to maintain a conversation together for five minutes without one asking the other what he thought of the weather. It is true still; but there is another question that of late years has become the stock question when two people meet one another, and that is, "When are you going away?" If a man replies boldly that he is not going away at all, he is looked upon as the very impersonation of eccentricity. "Not going away! Why, what are you going to do?" This "going away" means leaving our country-houses when the flowers are in their splendor and all nature bids us stay where we are, and starting off for Norway or Switzerland to spend our money among strange faces, drink bad wine, get in late for *table-d'hôte* when we are faint and weary, or find ourselves five flights of stairs from our pocket handkerchief in a towering edifice without a lift. But go where we will, we are sure to find ourselves not two chairs away from American tourists; they are everywhere. Sir James Ross used to say that if ever he reached the North Pole he would be sure to find a Scotchman sitting upon it. I don't know what has become of all the Scotchmen; they and the gypsies have grown rarer since I was a boy; but you can never escape from Americans. Of course there are Americans and Americans; they differ from one another as much as any other people do, as much and no more; but this is true of all the transatlantic tourists, they are abundantly supplied with money, and they do not grudge spending it; in fact, if we were to judge by the Americans we meet with in Europe, we should be forced to the conclusion that all Americans are rich, even very rich. But when I have asked them how clergymen and doctors and lawyers and elderly people with strictly limited incomes live in the United States,—such people as among us live in comfort with a couple of female servants, or even keep a pony chaise,—I have found my tourist acquaintances very much amused at my supposing that in America helps could be got to stay in such a household. "Are there, then, no small people in America?" I have asked. The answer has been more often than not, "If there are, we don't know them."

It is obvious that quiet, domestic people of small means are not to be met with among tourists at luxurious hotels, and equally obvious that such people are hard to get at by travelers who are themselves birds of passage. When a householder is living very near the wind, he does not like to expose his small economies and humble ways to a stranger; and because he is living a quiet, unostentatious life, he has little to offer to those whose occupation is seeing sights. But any man or woman who wishes to gain some insight into our domestic life may easily obtain it if he will but take the trouble to read our works of fiction. Our novelists come from the middle classes, not from the rich or leisure classes, and they speak as they do know. They tell us all about the habits and sentiments and ways of talking among clergymen and doctors and farmers and millers and clerks and shopkeepers in England; they show us the good and the bad side with equal impartiality, and no more faithful delineations have ever been made of the inner and outer life of the lowest struggling classes than are to be found in English literature. But if we want to get an insight into the *morale* of such people in America, we do not know where to look for it. Such a character as Kitty Ellison in Mr. Howell's "Chance Acquaintance," whose heart is with Uncle Jack and his anxieties and troubles while she is enjoying all the gayeties and luxuries that wealth can bestow, is a rarity in America; and, moreover, all the people one meets with in Mr. Howell's stories are away from home. In the "Biglow Papers" one does now and then get a hint that there are shrewd farmers and hard-headed country folk somewhere in the States, who do not wander very far, but one never gets to know them. That exquisite story of Mr. Stockton's, "Rudder Grange," as far as I know, occupies a unique position in American literature, and has for many of us lifted the veil from a whole world of little people across the Atlantic, of whose very existence some on our side the water had almost begun to entertain doubts. Yet we are in the habit of thinking that it is precisely among these people that we must look for the real heart of a great nation, and that the pulse of every great nation is to be felt among them, if at all.

But of all subjects of inquiry that a thoughtful Englishman could set himself to work at, the most instructive, the most suggestive, would be the effect of perfect equality between the vari-

ous religious bodies upon the philosophic speculations, religious sentiments, and ethical convictions of the American people. In England there is one Church by law established, and they who separate from the communion of that Church are all classed together as dissenters. That there should be anywhere on the face of the earth a condition of society where there can be no such thing as a dissenter, is a thought extremely difficult for some good folks here to grasp. But much harder is the other notion, which I presume is familiar enough to Americans, that there should be anywhere no sects. No dissenters, because no predominant or paramount Christian organization that rejoices in the "most-favored-nation" clause. No sects, because no Church recognized as *the* Church from which the other religious bodies have cut themselves off. That there should be no bigotry and exclusiveness, no *odium theologicum*, no fierce rivalry, no proselytizing, in America, as everywhere else, is inconceivable. Theological disputants will cease to wrangle when lawyers learn to love one another as brethren and doctors differ without asperity; but among us the situation is extremely embarrassing as between the Church—for with us it is *the* Church—and the non-conformist, that is, with those who will not subscribe to our Church doctrine, accept our formularies, or conform to our liturgy. Here we have a standard by which we try all other Christian bodies, and we pronounce them more or less orthodox or denounce them as absolutely unorthodox, in proportion as they approach or depart from this standard which is tacitly accepted among us as the established standard. If there were no Church of England by law established, I believe that a vast number of people would find themselves quite dazed, quite lost. To them it would be practically pretty much as if we were all to awake some fine morning to find that the Home Secretary had shut up Greenwich observatory and run away with the key, having previously taken measures to stop all the great clocks in the land. We should all of us be going by our own watches.

Yet somehow in America every man goes by his own watch; and if nobody is right, nobody else is likely to consider himself hopelessly wrong. Here the social position of the clergy of the established Church is something quite peculiar. There is no need to dwell upon the fact, but that it is a fact there can be no

doubt. The result is, that the attitude of the clergy* toward all the religious teachers has always been exclusive; there has never been any cordiality, and very little coöperation. I do not say this is not deplorable; I am concerned with facts only. A supercilious tone is so habitually natural to the clergyman when speaking or dealing with the dissenting minister, and a tone of soreness, jealousy, and suspicion on the part of the minister toward the clergyman seems to us so inseparable from their relations one to the other, that we in England can hardly bring ourselves to believe that the Episcopalian and the Independent, the Wesleyan and the Primitive Methodist, could meet on absolutely equal terms, just as officers of two regiments in the same army can meet at mess and fight valiantly side by side against the common foe. Every now and then we get one of those necessary evils, the religious newspapers, sent us by kind friends from America, or we catch a glimpse of an American bishop or Episcopalian popular preacher. Was it only a dream, or have I really, actually, in the flesh, once met with an American arch-deacon? But from these exalted personages and their organs surprisingly little is to be learned; and I observe that an ecclesiastic, let him come from where he may, is a shy creature, ready enough to listen, but not to talk. He puts himself on the defensive, and is so very much afraid of committing himself that you are apt to retire into your interior, too; just as I have observed two snails meeting on their evening walk; one at the approach of his brother shuts himself up in his shell, and the other tickles at him with his horns for a little while, but ends by accepting the situation, and shutting himself up also. Result, to all appearance, nothing but two unoccupied snail-shells, inhabitants having retired from publicity.

I cannot believe that even in America the priests of the Roman Church would ever assume any other than a haughty bearing toward all other Christian teachers. Theirs is either *the* Church, or it is nothing. But how do all the rest behave to one another? Are they all, in point of fact, merely ministers of

*It has been only of late years that any Christian ministers other than those ordained by the bishops of the Church of England have been called "clergymen" among us. The non-conformists were always called "ministers" or "preachers." I find myself driven to use the words "clergy" and "ministers" in the old way, to avoid conveying a wrong impression to my readers.

their respective congregations? How about proselytizing? It is comparatively easy to draw up a constitution that shall keep up a certain amount of discipline among the officers of any force; but it is quite another thing to keep control over the rank and file when they are all volunteers. Such a regiment as that famous one of Artemas Ward's, "composed exclusively of commanders-in-chief," would hardly be found a successful organization in the church militant. Are the clergy of all denominations held by all denominations in equal esteem? Do they "love as brethren," or do they bite and "devour one another"?

These are some of the questions I find myself continually asking when I turn my thoughts toward the magnificent country and the great nation on the other side of the ocean. I do not believe a man could get any answer to them, satisfactory to his own mind, except by personal observation. He must for a time live among living men, and see them at their daily tasks, to understand their life even a very little. It is too much the habit of travelers to take their theories with them. I, for my part, have none. If I ever carry out the wish of my life, I shall start as a naturalist does who goes to make collections—with empty cases, note-books, and apparatus—not too ready to generalize, but very anxious to learn. The probability is, I shall never go at all. But others more fortunate than I may, perhaps, be able to enlighten my darkness and inform my ignorance, and it may happen that the hints I have thrown out may be suggestive to them.

As to the big cities, with their colossal warehouses and enormous trade, their gigantic hotels and prodigious growth, they possess for me no attraction. There is something dreadful to my mind in losing my personality in a surging multitude and being absorbed in a crowd. To find myself unable to hear my own voice because steam-hammers are pounding all round me, and iron wheels are keeping up a ceaseless din, annihilating articulate speech,—that seems to me horrible. I shrink from these things. I should be found creeping into out-of-the-way places, prying into schools and colleges and universities, begging that nobody would notice me, while I might be permitted to notice everybody. Sometimes I should put very impertinent questions about the wonderful endowments that I hear Americans believe in firmly, just when we are beginning to

have lost our faith in their value. Sometimes I should even venture to inquire about the war—the war—the one war that reflected only imperishable glory upon both sides—the one civil war in the world's history that ended with the grandest of all triumphs, freedom to the oppressed, without one single act of vengeance inflicted upon the beaten side. Sometimes—but I am in danger of treading upon perilous ground, in danger of saying too much, in danger of making some one growl out suspiciously, “When you do come, if ever you do, you'd better keep out of my way!”

A few days ago, I was turning over an old volume of “Punch,” when I was attracted by a cartoon that may be familiar to some of my readers. A mighty coal-heaver, his day's work done, is leaning against one of the many posts to be found in the region of the Seven Dials, his hands in his pockets, his lips pipeless, his eyes staring at vacancy. By him stands an exquisitely dressed clergyman, tall, slim, gentle, refined, who has blandly laid his extended hand upon the other's brawny shoulder. Says the clergyman, “My friend, I want to go to Exeter Hall.” Says the coal-heaver, “Then why the dooce don't you go?” Was it that the good man did not know his way? or was he suffering from a little tightness in the chest?

AUGUSTUS JESSOPP.